TOXICS MANAGEMENT IN THE NIAGARA RIVER

Mention the Niagara River, and most people have visions of water thundering over the famous falls that border the United States and Canada. Few people realize, however, that until recently the Niagara River also carried the burden of toxic pollution. Dangerous compounds such as mercury, PCBs and pesticides were regularly detected at high concentrations in river waters and Lake Ontario fish. Alarmed by the high levels of pollution, the United States and Canada developed a cooperative transboundary management plan in 1987 to reduce inputs of toxic chemicals to the river.

Efforts to clean up the river have reduced toxic pollution and improved the appearance and safety of the water. Since 1981, for example, the EPA and the State of New York have attacked toxic discharges. Their aggressive control program has reduced point source inputs of toxics by 80 percent. Much of this reduction can be attributed to improved wastewater treatment by the city of Niagara Falls. Environmental clean-up efforts have also focused on the numerous hazardous waste sites along the banks of the river and its tributaries, including Love Canal. To date, clean-ups at these locations have reduced potential toxic inputs by 25 percent. Within the next year, additional actions should reduce these inputs by a total of 80 percent. Clean-up in tributaries of the Niagara River have also produced important environmental benefits through reductions of dioxin and PCBs.

Niagara Falls Park Commission

Because the United States and Canada are actively managing the Niagara's toxic inputs, the river is well on its way to recovery. The Lake Sturgeon is just one of the many examples of this progress. For the first time in decades, the species, which is native to the area, has returned to the upper reaches of the Niagara. Continued management of the Niagara's toxic pollution will further improve the aquatic ecosystem and restore the natural beauty of one of the nation's most treasured rivers.

[Return to Water Quality](#)